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ABSTRACT

The Child Care Employee Project hosted a 2-day working session in Berkeley, California, in an effort to explore questions raised by the National Child Care Staffing Study about what constitutes adequate professional preparation for child care teachers and providers. The mission of the meeting was to develop an agenda for research about the process of securing a skilled and stable work force. Two themes were dominant: (1) improvement of training must be accompanied by increased compensation; and (2) effective training requires sensitivity to cultural differences. Participants concluded that training is a process of professional development that involves three components: access, content, and follow-through. These three components must be addressed simultaneously by policymakers, practitioners, and researchers. Highlights of the discussion of the components, including sample policy-based research questions, are provided. (BC)

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The Qualified Work Force Project
Working Session: October 12 & 13, 1990
Summary Notes prepared by
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The Child Care Employee Project received support from the Smith Richardson Foundation to host a two day working session in Berkeley, California this fall to explore questions raised by the National Child Care Staffing Study about what constitutes adequate professional preparation for child care teachers and providers.

A small number of participants representing a broad cross section of the child care community were invited to attend. These included representatives of profit and non-profit care, center-based and family day care, training programs at the university, two year college, and community levels including High Scope and CDA. The mission of the meeting was to develop a research agenda around issues of securing a skilled and stable work force. Participants were asked to prepare brief comments about critical training issues emerging from their particular work with child care teachers and providers to extend and supplement the information provided by the National Child Care Staffing Study.

Two themes were raised repeatedly by participants at the Working Session regardless of the particular form of training in which they were involved. First, expansion and improvement of training for child care teachers and providers must be accompanied by increased compensation in order to achieve a qualified work force. Without this dual focus, turnover undermines training efforts. Second, effective training requires awareness and sensitivity to cultural differences between the trainer and trainees, between the trainees themselves and between the trainees and the families they serve. Because cultural assumptions are tied closely to child rearing, and because of the increasing diversity throughout the country, it is critical that providers are given an opportunity to understand and respond to these issues.

Participants also stressed the necessity of viewing training in a more dynamic manner--as part of an ongoing career path, rather than an event. Training, thus, is a process of professional development which involves three components: access, content and follow through. All three components must be addressed simultaneously by policy makers, practitioners, and researchers. Highlights of the discussion of these components, including sample research questions, are described below:

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ACCESS

People must be able to afford and take advantage of the training provided in their community. In part this is a question of finance and requires funds to directly cover the costs of the training to the trainee. Other factors must also be taken into account such as language and transportation barriers and the scheduling of training to accommodate life circumstances. Insuring access also requires funds be made available to worksites to allow for release time, substitutes etc. Direct financing of the cost of training also functions as an incentive to pursue more advanced professional preparation given the low wages in the field.

Examples of policy-based research questions to pursue:

- What forms of support for training are available to trainees and who takes advantage of them?
- How do loan assumption and scholarships impact on the career path of recipients?
- Access to training for early childhood practitioners is currently most accessible to Head Start workers. To what extent do other sectors benefit from this pool of trained providers? How do Head Start career paths vary from that of other providers?

CONTENT

People must be exposed to a coherent training program that is meaningful to them and sensitive to their ethnic background and life realities. Thus there is a core content to training that includes not only child development and developmentally appropriate curriculum but also basic self-esteem and cultural sensitivity. These latter components are critical if training is to be "received" and "accepted" as well as "given." This requires a focus by trainers on the needs of the adult learner, not just on the needs of the child who the adult will teach.

Too many people enter the child care field with a limited view of their own abilities. But at the same time, because of the societal myth that anyone can care for children, untrained providers may have a false notion of their competence as they care for children in a harsh, detached or insensitive manner. Thus providers require training that builds understanding that caring for children is a professional and demanding job and that the person being trained requires, and therefore must acquire, skills to do the task despite the limited economic reward. Empowering the trainee is also necessary to building a critical mass of providers able to advocate for the resources they deserve.

Examples of policy-based research questions to pursue:

- Descriptive data are needed about informal training systems and creative experiments to build self-esteem and empower teachers and providers.
- Similarly, descriptive information on funds being spent on training and the costs of different training approaches is needed.
- And the larger question still remains: what constitutes effective training? From a policy point of view, can we move beyond knowing that some training is better than none, to establishing a standard of training (or threshold) that insures proficiency with children?

FOLLOW THROUGH

Effective training requires a work place environment which rewards, extends and enhances the training experience. In addition to compensating people for training, the work environment must provide supervision and opportunity for discussion. These help to produce more effective teachers and providers and to keep people in the field through social support.

One particular concern is the lack of supervised field or work experience received by child care teachers and providers as part of their preservice or inservice training. The economic realities of the child care center often mean that directors spend little, if any time, on supervision of work with children. Ironically, this may be a task many directors are more skilled to perform than their other administrative duties. The absence of supervision is all the more troubling because most child care providers, even in centers, work in isolation more often that they work in pairs. And, there are few mentor or experienced teachers in the work environment. Thus, even if receiving training, many providers do not have the opportunity to "practice" what they have learned in collaboration with their colleagues.

The need for mentor teachers grows ever more critical because so many providers now receive no pre-service training. Rather, any inservice training they receive must function as training for the job they are already performing. While the early childhood field has a tradition of trained and untrained providers working together to create good environments for children (e.g., Head Start, parent co-ops, and laboratory schools), the critical element has always been the presence of senior or master teachers who directed and trained the untrained classroom participants. The goal is to create a system that establishes a career ladder with sufficient rewards that permit the retention of well trained, senior teachers in the classroom.

Examples of policy-based research questions to examine:

- How is training mediated by the presence or absence of well trained teachers?
- What do mentor teacher or similar programs contribute to the quality of teaching?
- When training is linked to regulation and compensation rewards, what effect does it have on the career path of recipients?
- What happens when compensation is not linked to training program?
- What happens in States where experience can be substituted for training?

Practitioners in the field, researchers and increasingly policy makers view the "whole" child when operating, evaluating and expanding programs for children. As we consider how to build a qualified child care work force for the nation, we must now think of the "whole" teacher/provider. We must consider the economic, cultural and developmental needs of teachers and providers if we are to design a career path that is accessible, meaningful, and sensitive to them and adaptable to the environment in which they will function.